A Parent's Guide to Standards Based Report Cards

LINDEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY - EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION - COMMITMENT TO SERVICE

2019-2020
**Purpose of the Standards Based Report Card**

The purpose of the report card is to **accurately communicate** to **parents, guardians** and **students** ongoing student achievement toward mastery of the grade level standards.

**Research Behind Standards Based Grading and Report Cards**

The research and experts in the field have asserted that standards based grading and reporting allows us to align our grading and reporting practices to our standards based instructional practices. When implemented, standards based grading and reporting allows us to more accurately and consistently report student achievement to students and parent/guardians as it relates to state standards.

**Standards Based Grading is aligned to our District Mission Statement**

*The mission of the Linden Public is to promote distinction through the infinite resource that is Linden’s diversity, combined with our profound commitment to instructional excellence, so that each and every student achieves their maximum potential in an engaging, inspiring, and challenging learning environment.*

Grades are the ultimate form of feedback to a student about their progress toward mastery of the standards. Grades need to be accurate and meaningful. Students and parents need a precise picture of what has been learned and what still needs to be learned. Grading and reporting around specific standards **while using the accompanying strategy of formative assessment with feedback** related to progress toward mastery of standards can significantly boost achievement and motivation for students.
Standards-Based System

Learning comes first in a standard based system. It is an ongoing teaching and learning cycle that ensures all students learn and can demonstrate proficiency in grade level standards. A standard based system continually asks and answers the following critical questions:

1. What do students know, understand and are able to do?
2. How will we teach effectively to ensure students learn?
3. How will we know that students have learned?
4. What will we do when students don’t learn or reach proficiency?

Standards Based Instruction
Provides a strong focus for learning
Guides instruction so that it focuses on student learning
Provides a common language to have conversations and collaboration
Helps ensure equal educational opportunities for all students

Standards Based Grading
The purpose of standards based grading is to align grading practices with the content standards by more accurately measuring and reporting student’s proficiency in meeting those standards. Standards-based grading provides accurate information to students and families on student’s progress and mastery toward meeting grade level standards. Grades must be meaningful, consistent, accurate and supportive of learning.

Standards-based grading includes the following guidelines:
Grades must be related to academic standards
Grades should be based only on academic standards
Grades are based on quality assessments and properly recorded evidence
Work samples and report card criteria are reference points for grading

(US Department of Education)

Standards Based Reporting
Standards based reporting provides a comprehensive picture of students’ academic progress by identifying specific areas of strength as well as areas of need. Rather than looking at a subject in a holistic way, standards based reporting examines each subject area through specific elements (standards of learning) in a specific way.

Instead of students receiving one grade that represents multiple criteria including an average of multiple standards, student behaviors and work habits; standards based reporting identifies areas of strength and weakness in relation to performance solely on the standards. Providing more detailed information allows parents and students to understand more clearly what learning is expected at each grade level. With this understanding, parents will be better able to guide and support their child’s learning in specific ways.
**Levels of Progress**

Four levels of progress are noted on the report cards using a numeric marking system (4, 3, 2, 1, and N/A). A descriptor for each score is provided below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Distinguished Student independently understands and applies knowledge in ways that extend higher level thinking skills of the grade level standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Proficient Student independently and consistently understands and demonstrates knowledge of key concepts, processes and skills to meet grade level standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Developing Student is beginning to understand and apply key concepts, processes and skills. Progressing towards grade level standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Needs Support Student does not yet understand key concepts, processes and skills necessary to meet grade level standards. Area of concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Standard Is Not Assessed At This Time This standard is assessed later in the school year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scoring:**

On a standards-based report card, a mark of “3” is the expected goal for students, which indicates that the student is meeting the requirements of the academic standards for his/her grade level. Marks of “3” and “2” both indicate that a student is working within the expectations of his/her grade level. The expectation is that most students will achieve a “3” by the end of the year for each grade-level standard. Learners are scored on their progress made toward mastery of those expectations set forth for each marking period.

4 – A mark of “4” indicates that the student’s progress is distinguished because s/he has demonstrated mastery in terms of knowledge, and s/he applies that knowledge in ways that extend higher level thinking skills. Typically, very few students would be at this level of performance.

3 – A mark of “3” indicates that the student’s progress towards end of the year standards meets the district’s expectations at this time. For example, a student who scores a 30% on the unit math pretest and receives a high score, even a 100%, on the posttest has responded well to instruction and receives a “3”. This student has met the expectation independently and requires little to no adult support to demonstrate proficiency after instruction has been delivered.

2 - A mark of “2” indicates that the student’s progression of skills and information is in the expected range, but s/he still requires support and assistance to meet the requirements of the academic standard for his/her grade level at this time.
1 – A mark of “1” indicates that the student is not meeting the requirements of the grade level standard at this time. His/her instructional level is characterized as requiring maximum teacher support and differentiation/accommodations or even modifications.

N/A – A mark of “N/A” indicates that the standard has not been adequately introduced, covered, or assessed during the marking period. All standards on a grade-level report card will be addressed by the end of the school year.

**Students as Data Users:**
Our goal in standards based grading is to provide students with the necessary scaffolds to increase student achievement and student motivation by providing students with specific feedback. The student friendly four-point scoring system is a tool that can be used with your child. Students can look at the chart and indicate their level of knowledge and comfort with the standard being learned. This tool allows the student to self-reflect on where they are in relation to meeting the standards introduced in the lesson.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I'm cool with this and I fully understand what I need to do and I can complete the work all by myself. I can explain it to others and even help my peers understand! I can use what I know and I can apply my knowledge when learning about new concepts or when answering questions or solving problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I am happy and feel proud to say that I fully understand what I need to do and I can complete the work all by myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yikes, this makes me a little nervous. I don’t fully understand what I need to do and I need some help to complete the work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Oh no, not this! I don't understand and I don't even know where to begin. I still need my teacher to sit with me and show me what to do step by step.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Frequently Asked Questions**

**What are standards?**
Standards are what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade. It would be impossible to list every standard on the report card. The standards on the Linden Public School elementary report card are a snapshot, a “collapsed” version, of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards.

**What is a standards-based report card?**
A standards-based report card provides detailed information on how well your child is progressing towards mastery of year-end standards. Standards’ expectations change from one marking period to the next as students move toward the end-of-the-year grade level expectations. Learners are scored on their progress made toward mastery of those expectations set forth for each marking period.

**How does the standards-based report card compare to a traditional letter grade system?**
Standards based reporting is different from traditional letter grade reporting. Letter grades are often calculated by combining how well the student met a teacher’s expectations, how the student performed on assignments and tests, how much effort the teacher believes the student put and how the student is doing in comparison to other classmates. Letter grade do not tell parents which skills their child has mastered or whether he or she is working at grade level. The standard-based report cards measure how well an individual student is doing in relation to the grade level standards, not the work of other students. This will give parents a better understanding of their child’s strengths and weaknesses and encourage all students to do their best.

**Why are all the standards not listed on the report card?**
A standards-based report card is not the same as a list of standards. The report card was developed by a group of Linden Public School District teachers and administrators who reviewed the New Jersey Student Learning Standards and chose report card descriptors that best summarize learning at each grade level.

**What examples of data do teachers use to assign grades?**
With a standards-based approach, teachers evaluate student learning in a variety of ways using classroom observations and classwork, along with formative and summative assessments. The combination of these pieces of evidence, when reviewed with parents, provides a more detailed picture of student progress towards grade level expectations.

**Is it possible for students to “drop” from one marking period to another?**
It is important to note that the student does not necessarily drop a grade. The score is an indication of performance with expectations of difficulty that increases throughout the school year. In other words, the concepts increase in difficulty as the year progresses. Therefore, a student who demonstrates a score of “3” in the first trimester could earn a “2” in the second trimester when the rigor of the standard has been increased. This shift from a “3” to a “2” indicates the student understands the major elements of the concept but may need more development and more teacher support.
**How do I help my child “get a 4?”**

A “4” is not equivalent to an “A”. Remember, a mark of “3” indicates that a student is meeting grade-level expectations with independence and excellence. With high and challenging expectations, a “3” is exactly where a student should be by the end of the year. “Getting a 4” is not about what *more* a student does. It is what a student knows, and at what level s/he applies what s/he knows to new and higher-level situations that extends thinking to a higher level of skill and application. A student who receives a “4” is characterized by self-motivation and the ability to apply skills with consistent accuracy, independence, and a higher level of quality.

**My child has an IEP. How will he or she be assessed?**

There are modifications and accommodations in your child’s IEP to support his or her progress of the grade level standards as assessed on a standards-based report card. A lack of indicated progress on the report card could require further exploration of additional modifications and accommodations.

**How are English Language Learners (ELL) who are still acquiring English language speaking and literacy skills graded?**

Students are assessed at their current grade level using the appropriate grade-level standard-based report card. During parent conferences, teachers will discuss with parents the following: the child’s current level of English proficiency; the child’s opportunity to learn the content and/or ability to demonstrate the appropriate grade-level standards.